



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About... Ringworm

##### What is ringworm?

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the skin which can appear on any area of the body including the scalp, groin area ("jock itch"), or feet ("athlete's foot"). Ringworm is not a serious condition except in persons with weakened immune systems and usually begins as a small red bump or papule that spreads outward, so that each affected area takes on the appearance of a red, scaly outer ring with a clear central area. The lesions are frequently itchy, and can become infected if scratched.

##### How is ringworm spread?

Ringworm is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact or by coming into contact with contaminated items, e.g., combs, unwashed clothing, bedding, and shower or swimming pool surfaces. A variety of animals, including dogs and cats (especially puppies and kittens), cows, goats, pigs, and horses, can also pass ringworm to humans.

##### Who is at risk for ringworm?

The fungus that causes ringworm prefers damp, close environments. Warm, humid settings that promote heavy sweating aid in spreading ringworm, so athletes are at increased risk. Ringworm is common in young children, and outbreaks can occur in schools, child-care settings, and nurseries. Children with pets are also at increased risk.

##### How do I know if I have ringworm?

Ringworm presents itself in slightly different ways depending on the body area that is affected:

- Scalp (tinea capitis) – Ringworm on the scalp appears as an itchy, bald patch of scaly skin. This form of ringworm is most common in children.
- Groin (tinea cruris) – Symptoms include itching or burning in the groin, thigh, or anal area. The skin in these areas is red and often flakes, peels, or cracks.
- Feet (tinea pedis) – Itching, burning, redness, and stinging between the toes and sometimes on the foot itself are typical symptoms.
- Body (tinea corporis) – Ringworm on other areas of the body usually appears as a ring shape that is reddish and causes intense itching. The skin inside the ring may appear healthy. The rash can be either dry and scaly or wet and crusty. Often there can be several patches of ringworm on the skin at one time.

### **How can ringworm be treated?**

When used as directed, over-the-counter antifungal medications (creams and sprays) can effectively treat mild cases of ringworm. Consult a healthcare provider for more severe cases or cases that do not improve within 2-4 weeks with over-the-counter medications. Prescription medications, topical or oral, may be used to treat ringworm.

### **How is ringworm prevented?**

Ringworm is common and contagious before symptoms appear, making it difficult to prevent.

- Wash hands thoroughly and often, especially after contact with animals
- Clean common areas in child-care centers, gyms, and locker rooms.
- Wear waterproof shoes or “flip-flops” in public showers and swimming areas
- Keep all clothing, including bedclothes, clean
- Stay cool and dry – avoid wearing thick clothing (e.g., socks) for long periods of time in warm, humid weather
- Check your pets for areas of hair loss and consult your veterinarian
- Avoid sharing personal items, e.g., clothing, towels, hairbrushes, and shoes
- Individuals with ringworm should not swim in pools and avoid contact sports until lesions have cleared.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

National Institutes of Health Website on ringworm at:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001439.htm> Kid’s Health

Website on ringworm at:

<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/infections/fungal/ringworm.html>

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